

SUNSHINE ADVISORY

A Bulletin on Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records Laws

By Attorney General Tom Miller – March 2005

“Sunshine Week”: Let the Sun Shine!

March 13-19 marks “Sunshine Week,” a time to focus on Iowa’s sunshine laws – the Open Meetings Law, and the Public Records Law. (Iowa Code Chapters 21 and 22.) These are the laws that assure public access to meetings and public records at all levels of government in Iowa.

“Sunshine Week” also marks the Attorney General’s 41st monthly “Sunshine Advisory” since the first in November 2001. The bulletins discuss specific aspects of Iowa’s sunshine laws.

Here are a few highlights summarized from the past 40 Sunshine Advisories:

- C Every person has the right to examine and copy public records, unless confidential under law.
- C The public is entitled to use cameras and recording devices at open meetings.
- C A government body must make copies of open records available at the actual cost of copying.
- C Minutes of an open meeting must show the action taken and the vote of each member.
- C No one is required to provide a reason for examining or copying a public record.
- C Open meetings can close only for one of eleven specific reasons provided by statute.
- C The public can drop in at any time during customary office hours to examine open records.
- C A government body is never allowed to use secret ballots when voting in open session.
- C The public can have access to open records in any form – paper, tapes, or electronic files.
- C An agenda is required for a closed session, even though the public cannot attend the session.
- C A government body may elect to respond to requests for records sent by phone, mail or fax.
- C Minutes and tape recordings of closed sessions must be maintained for at least one year.

For copies of all 40 Sunshine Advisories, and for other “sunshine” information, visit our web site at www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org (click on “open government” at bottom.)

Citizens who have inquiries or complaints about public records or open meetings may call the Iowa Citizens’ Aide/Ombudsman Office – toll-free at 888-IA-OMBUD (888-426-6283.)

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Iowa Attorney General’s Office: Hoover Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

On the Web: www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org . (Click on “open government.”)